

VZCZCXRO4951
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHRY #0010/01 0041520
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 041520Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2013
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000010

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV ELAB ASEC KDEM PREL GV

SUBJECT: CIVIL DISTURBANCES IN GUINEA'S CAPITAL - UNIONS
WARN OF STRIKES

REF: CONAKRY 0007

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. A number of demonstrations and civil disturbances flared across Conakry between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM on January 4, following the president's January 3 dismissal of the Minister of Communication. The PM convened an extraordinary Council of Ministers meeting while political parties, unions, and civil society groups held independent meetings. Reportedly, the unions plan to issue a formal declaration advising the government of their intention to initiate a nationwide strike effective January 10. As of 4:00 PM, Embassy did not have information as to the results of other government and civil society meetings. The situation has generally calmed. Embassy continues to monitor events. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Following the sequence of events detailed in reftel, at about 8:30 PM on January 3, Radio TV Guinean announced that President Lansana Conte had dismissed Minister of Communication, Justin Morel Jr, and replaced him with Conte crony, Issa Conde.

¶3. (SBU) Beginning around 9:00 AM on January 4, Embassy received reports of demonstrations in certain areas of the capital. Demonstrators reportedly threw stones and later burned tires. Embassy staff saw anti-crime brigades on the ground as well as armed police forces. There were a few reports of guns being fired into the air and of demonstrators blocking roads with concrete blocks. Embassy official saw forces firing shots into crowds, but could not determine whether they were firing plastic bullets or not. To date, Embassy has not received reports of people killed. The crowds began to dissipate around noon and the streets were mostly clear as of 4:00 PM. The Ambassador, who was returning from a trip up country on January 4, saw no evidence of civil unrest outside of the capital.

¶4. (SBU) According to contacts, leaders of opposition parties held a meeting at around 10:00 AM to discuss the political situation. The ruling Party for Unity and Progress (PUP) was not present and the Rally for the Guinean People (RPG) party was reportedly not invited. Embassy contact told POL LES that the parties would issue a formal declaration around 3:00 PM local time in which they would encourage the population to remain calm. Embassy has not yet seen this declaration.

¶5. (U) The Prime Minister convened an extraordinary Council of Ministers meeting at 12:00 PM on January 4. As of 4:00 PM, the meeting was still in session.

¶6. (U) Civil society organizations, under the leadership of Ben Sekou Syllah and the National Council of Civil Society Organizations, also met on January 4. As of 4:00 PM, Embassy did not have any information as to the results of that meeting.

¶7. (SBU) Labor union leaders met at 10:30 AM on January 4.

As of 4:00 PM, they were still meeting, but a union contact present at the meeting told POL LES that the unions had reached a decision and were in the process of drafting a formal declaration. According to contacts, the unions plan to advise the government that they will initiate a nationwide strike effective January 10 (COMMENT. January 10 is the anniversary of the 2007 nationwide strike. END COMMENT). Union members reportedly see the strike as a necessary political statement in order to emphasize that the January 27 Accords have been violated.

¶ 8. (U) In accordance with the guidance given to U.S. Embassy personnel, the Emergency Action Committee (EAC) met at 11:00 and agreed to issue a warden message. The message went out at 11:40 AM on January 4, warning U.S. citizens of civil disturbances and advising them to take appropriate precautions.

¶ 9. (SBU) In response to the demonstrations and general state of heightened political tension, the Embassy convened a second Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting at 3:00 PM, the details of which are reported septel.

COMMENT

¶ 10. (SBU) Local press has been inundated with rumor-based reporting and widespread speculation, as have conversations with a wide range of contacts. The events described above represent the facts as currently understood by the Embassy. How and if these events are connected, as well as who may be behind them and why, remain unclear. For the time being, tensions and civil activity appear to have diminished. The

CONAKRY 00000010 002 OF 002

unions, declaration will likely help calm the population since it will define a clear position and gives a timeframe within which the unions and civil society can work with the government to address concerns. As the results of other meetings become available and as communication with key contacts becomes easier, Embassy hopes to clarify the various political elements and get a better sense of what may be going on behind the scenes. END COMMENT.

CARTER